

# To Depict Infinity

## The Artwork of Wulf Barsch

Wulf Barsch studied art in Hamburg and Hanover, Germany, and is now Professor of Visual Arts at BYU. Although Barsch gives order to his paintings through mathematical precision and “sacred geometry”—divine proportions, circles, squares, parabolas, and the like—his brush stroke is loose, spontaneous, and very modern. The synthesis between the ancient Greek emphasis on proportion and his modern techniques brings a certain timeless character to his work.



*MDCCCCIC*, by Wulf Barsch. Oil on canvas, 78" x 52", 1999. Courtesy Wulf Barsch.



A recurring element of Wulf Barsch's paintings is dynamic symmetry, otherwise known as the golden mean. Mathematicians and artisans alike have noted that the ratio of the golden mean (1.618) is found ubiquitously in nature and in the universe. For this reason, many Renaissance artists referred to it as the divine proportion because it was considered an unmistakable sign of God's imprint on his creations. To get a sense for the divine proportion, notice the ratio that is created as the horizon divides the translucent center columns in this painting. *Et in Arcadia Ego...*, by Wulf Barsch. Oil on canvas, 52" x 78", 2000. Courtesy Wulf Barsch.



Barsch often includes a logarithmic spiral in his work that is based upon rectangles having the 1.618 ratio of the golden mean. This spiral evokes a sense of the infinite because it is formed by creating arcs through smaller and smaller (or larger and larger) “golden rectangles” that can be continued seemingly forever. Spirals such as these abound in the universe—from the double helix found in DNA to seashells, antelope horns, and even vast galaxies. *Ex Corde Lux*, by Wulf Barsch. Oil on canvas, 82" x 126", 2004. Courtesy Wulf Barsch.



Symbolic gestures toward the infinite universe are recurring themes in Barsch's art. His underlying motif is combining mathematical precision with fluidity: Barsch conveys a deep spiritual tone through depicting the proportion and order, as well as the apparent creativity, found in nature and the cosmos. "*For the Moon Is My Brother and the Morningstar Is My Offspring*," by Wulf Barsch. Oil on canvas, 40" x 30", 2002. Courtesy Wulf Barsch.





In Barsch's paintings there is a sense of longing for home; not merely in a temporal sense but in an eternal, interstellar sense. In this painting, the palm trees seem to take on an anthropomorphic quality, reaching away from the shade of the groves of which they are a part, as if they are yearning for an infinite, celestial home. *Untitled*, by Wulf Barsch. Oil on canvas, 48" x 52", 2003. Courtesy Wulf Barsch.



Though symmetry pervades this work, a lively motion contrasts the orderly proportions. The swirling movement and the celestial bodies in orbit evoke a sense of constant flow—that the creativity of God is everlastingly under way. This sense of being under way is also indicative of the story Barsch interweaves through all his works. A single painting does not have a beginning, middle, and end to its story; rather, his paintings act as only a part of a larger narrative that gives us a more expansive vision of nature and creation. “*I Am a Brother to Dragons and a Companion to Owls*,” by Wulf Barsch. Oil on canvas, 20" x 24", 2005. Courtesy Wulf Barsch.